DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 430 371 EC 307 224

TITLE	Positive Behavioral Support.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, Reston, VA. ERIC/OSEP Special Project on Interagency Information Dissemination.
SPONS AGENCY	Special Education Programs (ED/OSERS), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1999-00-00
NOTE	9p.
CONTRACT	ED-99-CO-0026
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC/OSEP Special Project, ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Dr., Reston, VA 20191-1589; Tel: 703-620-3660; Tel: 703-264-9449 (TTY).
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Information Analyses (070)
JOURNAL CIT	Research Connections in Special Education; n4 Win 1998
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Behavior Change; *Behavior Disorders; Discipline; Elementary Secondary Education; *Instructional Effectiveness; Intervention; Outcomes of Treatment; Research and Development; *Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	*Functional Assessment; Individuals with Disabilities Educ Act Amend 1997; *Positive Behavioral Support

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a synthesis of the research on positive behavioral support (PBS) for students with challenging behaviors. PBS is a long-term approach to reducing the inappropriate behavior, teaching a more appropriate behavior, and providing the contextual supports necessary for successful outcomes. It notes that the 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act require both a functional behavioral assessment and consideration of PBS to address challenging behavior. Overall, research is reported that shows that when PBS strategies are implemented schoolwide, children with and without disabilities benefit. Specific research reports are summarized and their key recommendations outlined. These studies support the implementation of PBS goals with guidelines such as alter the student's environment; provide schoolwide support; develop post-behavioral expectations in every classroom; use a cognitive-behavioral time-out strategy; implement specific positive supports for individual students; conduct functional assessments; understand cultural influences on behavior; work with families; and use technology to disseminate information. A contact list for authors of the summarized reports is attached. (DB)

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ED 430 371

Research Connections

in Special Education

This Issue

Number 4
Winter 1999

Federal law now requires that the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team consider strategies, including positive behavioral interventions and supports, to address inappropriate behavior that impedes a student's learning and/or the learning of others. This issue describes promising research in using positive behavioral supports to improve learning opportunities for students with disabilities.

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"Positive behavioral support has changed the way I view my son for the better—it opens up possibilities for him to have a better life."

Denise Poston, Parent of a child with autism who has challenging behavior

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Development funded by U.S. Office of Special Education Programs

Positive Behavioral Support

Helping Students with Challenging Behaviors Succeed

Fighting, biting, hitting, scratching, kicking, screaming—as well as extreme withdrawal—are behaviors that challenge even the best educators and families. For years, researchers and practitioners alike have asked the question: Why does a particular child act that way?

Positive behavioral support (PBS) offers one approach for understanding **why** the challenging behavior occurs—its function or its purpose for the individual. In addition to helping practitioners and families understand the individual with the challenging behavior, PBS also helps them understand the physical and social contexts of the behavior.

Unlike traditional behavioral management, which views the individual as the sole problem and seeks to "fix" him or her by quickly eliminating the challenging behavior, PBS views such things as settings and lack of skill as parts of the "problem" and works to change those. As such, PBS is characterized as a long-term approach to reducing the inappropriate behavior, teaching a more appropriate behavior, and providing the contextual supports necessary for successful outcomes.

"Positive behavioral interventions and support assist students in learning positive responses that result in more responsible behavior and academic success," **Larry Sullivan**, Assistant Executive Director for the National Association of School Psychologists points out. "These proactive strategies are now required as part of federal law."

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Positive Behavioral Support (continued)

Although the majority of violent acts in schools are not committed by students with IEPs, discipline and violence were addressed by the 1997 Reauthorization of ***Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*** (IDEA). The focus in how students with disabilities are to be disciplined was shifted [SEC. 614 (d)(3)(B)]. IDEA requires the IEP team to consider using PBS to address behavior that impedes the child's learning and/or the learning of others.

In addition, IDEA now requires that a functional behavioral assessment be conducted for a student with an IEP either before or not later than 10 days after a disciplinary action is taken [SEC. 615. (k)(1)(B)(i)]. A functional behavioral assessment ensures that the student's behavioral intervention plan is designed to meet that child's unique needs.

Research—much of it supported by the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education—has shown that PBS is effective in assisting students with challenging behaviors. In fact, research also has shown that when PBS strategies are implemented schoolwide, children with and without disabilities benefit. They learn more about their own behaviors, learn to work together, and support each other as a community of learners.

A Synthesis of Research

With OSEP funding, researcher **Edward Carr** at State University of New York at Stony Brook and his colleagues conducted a synthesis of research on PBS. The research studies (over one hundred research articles between 1985 and 1996 published in peer-reviewed journals) involved individuals with mental retardation, autism, and/or pervasive developmental disorders. Challenging behaviors included self-injury, aggression, property destruction, and tantrums. Results show that

- PBS is widely successful with individuals with serious challenging behaviors.
- Research in PBS is growing, particularly in our knowledge of how to use the results of assessments and how to correct environmental deficiencies.
- PBS is effective in reducing problem behavior by 80% in two-thirds of the cases.
- Success rates are higher when intervention is based on functional assessment.

According to **Ann Turnbull**, researcher at the University of Kansas who assisted Carr on the synthesis, the study showed a need for research on outcome measures beyond the reduction of challenging behaviors. "Only 2.6% of the studies addressed the outcomes that matter most to consumers—comprehensive lifestyle enhancements such as greater independence, productivity, and inclusion," Turnbull laments. "When behavior changes, it should have a positive effect on other outcomes, such as having enjoyable lives—having friends, hanging out in community settings, and being included at school and in jobs." The importance of studying the effects of behavior change was confirmed in a series of focus groups with families and consumers that Turnbull led as part of an OSEP funded project.

Turnbull recommends the following research-based actions to support positive behaviors in individuals with significant disabilities:

- *Respond to individual needs.* Services and programs should be responsive to the preferences, strengths, and needs of individuals with challenging behavior. In addition, students may benefit from instruction in self-determination skills, social skills, goal-setting, and independent learning skills.
- *Alter environments.* If something in the individual's environment influences the challenging behavior, it is important to organize the environment for success. For example, clearly defined work spaces and quiet work areas may assist a child who is noise-sensitive.
- *Teach new skills to the individual with challenging behavior and members of his or her social network.* Individuals need to be taught alternative, appropriate responses that serve the same purpose as the challenging behavior.
- *Appreciate positive behaviors.* It is important to reinforce and acknowledge all positive behaviors consistently.

PBS Preservice Materials

Based on the synthesis, preservice training modules are being developed by the OSEP-funded Academy project at the University of Kansas. The courses will be delivered on-line and will be available to qualifying teacher education institutions (see their web site at: **www.onlineacademy.org**).

Positive Behavioral Support In Action

Researchers are finding that PBS is effective with general education and special education students. Following are a few examples of researchers who are expanding our understanding of PBS.

Implementing PBS in Schools for All Students

George Sugai and **Robert Horner** are researchers at the University of Oregon, where they direct the OSEP-funded Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support. The Center's goal is to increase the capacity of schools, families, and communities to support and educate children with significant problem behaviors.

With funding from OSEP over the years, Horner and Sugai have studied PBS in over 65 schools in Oregon, Hawaii, Texas, and British Columbia. Their schoolwide approach (which they call Effective Behavioral Support) defines, teaches, and encourages appropriate behavior in children in elementary and middle schools. "Effective Behavioral Support is based on the fact that about 85% of students have the social skills to do quite well if placed in a reasonable environment," Horner explains. "With our approach, schools establish an effective environment, which frees teachers to devote special attention to the students who have more challenging behavioral problems."

To address the behavioral needs of all students, Horner and Sugai suggest an approach that considers support from four perspectives:

- ***Schoolwide support*** — procedures and processes that are intended for all students, all staff, and all settings. The most important element of support is a building-wide team that oversees all development, implementation, modification, and evaluation activities.
- ***Specific setting support*** — a team-based mechanism for monitoring specific settings that exist within the school environment. In settings where problem behaviors occur, teams should develop strategies that prevent or minimize their occurrence.
- ***Classroom support*** — processes and procedures of the individual classrooms where teachers structure learning opportunities. They should parallel the features and procedures that are used schoolwide.
- ***Individual student support*** — immediate, relevant, effective, and efficient responses to students who present the most significant behavioral challenges; processes and procedures for high-intensity, specially designed and individualized interventions for the estimated 3 to 7 percent of students who present the most challenging behavior.

Strategies for the schoolwide, specific setting, and classroom levels include having

- A clear, positive purpose.
- A set of positively stated expectations for prosocial behavior.
- Procedures for teaching schoolwide expectations.
- A continuum of procedures for encouraging students to display expected behaviors.
- A continuum of procedures for discouraging violations of schoolwide expectations.
- A method for monitoring implementation and effectiveness.

At the student level, procedures include functional assessment strategies, social skills instruction, self-management training, and direct instruction. For implementation of the procedures at the individual student level to be effective, schoolwide PBS must be in place and functioning efficiently. However, Sugai adds, "students with significant challenging behavior most likely will need special attention."

A Schoolwide Plan for PBS

Imagine experiencing a 42% drop in office referrals in one year's time! That's what happened at Fern Ridge Middle School in Elmira, Oregon, when Principal **Susan Taylor-Greene** and her staff implemented Horner's and Sugai's PBS approach. They emphasized

- Defining and teaching expected behaviors.
- A structured process for rewarding appropriate social behaviors throughout the school year.
- Office referral for inappropriate behaviors.

"The staff and I began with a belief that we could make significant changes, but we found that change had to start with us." Taylor-Greene points out that "if you want to approach students from a proactive perspective, then the staff must work as a team—which means being consistent in their expectations and reactions to students' behaviors."

Staff at Fern Ridge put the three levels of PBS recommended by Horner and Sugai into place. The first level is preventive and, according to Taylor-Greene, provides the necessary supports to 80% to 90% of the student population. After doing an analysis of the school en-

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vironment, the staff defined their expectations for student behavior—called "High Five." At the beginning of the year, staff directly taught the skills underlying these expectations (a training manual is available for purchase from the school). Students then practiced the appropriate behaviors with reinforcement and feedback. "To support the students, we have a schoolwide token economy which reinforces youngsters for appropriate behaviors throughout the year," Taylor-Greene notes, and adds that the High Five expectations are posted in every classroom.

High Five Expectations

- Be respectful.
- Be responsible.
- Follow directions.
- Keep hands and feet to one's self.
- Be there and be ready.

While this level is very effective, some students need more structure to help them solve problems and set goals. These students attend daily morning check-in and afternoon check-out sessions with counseling staff. Students carry a point card on which teachers can award points when the youngster demonstrates the High Five expectations. The card is brought to the counselor at the end of each day and sent home to families. An individualized behavioral education plan (BEP) is also developed for these students.

"Even with this additional structure, some kids still aren't making it," Taylor-Greene confides. To support these students, a more intensive BEP is developed.

Responding with Support: The Think Time Strategy

According to Arizona State University researcher, **Ron Nelson**, the consistent, systematic interpersonal response to disruptive behavior is also critical in providing PBS and goes hand-in-hand with a schoolwide discipline policy. "We found that despite the implementation of proactive strategies, some students still exhibited disruptive behaviors," Nelson explains. "With these students, typical classroom management approaches that rely on repeated warnings are problematic for three reasons: they often reinforce the disruptive behavior; they do not help the student distinguish the appropriate behavior from the inappropriate one; and they can result in power struggles between teachers and students."

With OSEP support, Nelson developed and researched the ***Think Time Strategy***, a cognitive-behavioral time-out strategy designed to

- Enable the teacher and student to stop a negative social exchange.
- Provide the student feedback and an opportunity to plan.

The Think Time Strategy requires teamwork between two or more teachers and the establishment of a Think Time area in each teacher's classroom. Teachers teach all students the strategy, using these steps:

- **Teacher catches the disruptive behavior early.** In a calm manner, the teacher requests or prompts the youngster to adjust the behavior. If the student does not comply, the teacher directs the student to the Think Time area in the cooperating teacher's classroom.
- **Student moves to the designated Think Time area.** Routines are put into place to support students in moving appropriately to the area in the other classroom.
- **Teacher in charge of the Think Time area debriefs with the student.** After the student has thought about the behavior and gained self-control, the teacher asks the student to describe the behavior. If the student complies, then the he or she is given a debriefing form to complete (e.g., identify the inappropriate behavior; identify appropriate behavior). If the student does not comply, then the teacher calmly responds with, "I'll be back to you." The teacher returns later and resumes the process.
- **Teacher in charge of the Think Time area checks student's debriefing responses.** If correct, the student goes back to the classroom; if incorrect, the

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> *"One of the most important things I do as the district PBS coordinator is remind people to think proactively. I say, 'How would we solve this child's problem if we were thinking PBS?' That usually redirects people away from a reactive approach."*
>
> *Carol Sadler*
> *Tigard-Tualatin School District, Oregon*

teacher responds with, "I'll be back to you." The teacher returns later and resumes the process.

- **Student rejoins the class.** The teacher reviews the behavioral debriefing form. If it is correct, the student joins the classroom. If it is incorrect, the student returns to the Think Time area.

"We studied the effects of the Think Time strategy on 25 students over the course of a year," Nelson reports. "The results showed significant changes in the youngsters' academic performance, school survival, and social adjustment." Additionally, Nelson found that office referrals for disruptive behavior decreased from over 700 annually to 71 in one year.

Suzanne Schmick, Principal of Endicott Elementary-St. John Middle School in rural Washington, attests to the usefulness of the approach. "In conjunction with our schoolwide discipline plan, the Think Time strategy helps us reduce problem behaviors and prevent those that do occur from escalating."

Schmick and her staff introduced the strategy to students during the first few weeks of September and reinforced it throughout the year. Teachers directly taught the steps and routines to students. "It is important to be very clear and consistent about expectations," Schmick points out. "This means that the staff must have conversations about the approach throughout the year." To support teachers, Schmick recommends the following:

- Make sure staff agree philosophically with the approach and see a real need for it.
- Provide sufficient time for training and follow-up support.
- Limit other initiatives so that teachers can become proficient.
- Encourage sharing with teachers in other districts who are using the strategy.
- Provide incentives.

Using Functional Assessment with Young Children

With OSEP support, researcher **Debra Kamps**, at the University of Kansas, has been studying the use of functional assessment with young children. "Experienced teachers can learn informal functional assessment techniques and use the results to determine the best targeted intervention," Kamps asserts.

In one project, case studies were conducted to improve the social and behavioral performance of young children identified as having behavior risks in Head Start and kindergarten classrooms. According to Kamps, the functional assessment of environmental events allowed researchers to determine the functions and maintenance of inappropriate behaviors so that interventions could be prescribed.

The results of the case studies were encouraging: children's behaviors improved over time. These changes were a result of environmental manipulations including

- Increased teacher praise and reinforcement for appropriate behavior and peer interaction.
- Decreased teacher attention for inappropriate behavior.
- More structure in classroom routines and rule following.

Kamps recommends that practitioners consider incorporating the following positive supports when addressing challenging behaviors:

- Direct instruction of appropriate behavior and social rules.
- Use of behaviorally appropriate role models.
- Use of concrete, visual examples of positive interaction and play.
- Consistent, frequent reinforcement of prosocial behaviors.
- Incidental teaching and reinforcement of appropriate behaviors; redirection of antisocial behaviors.

Functional Assessment

A functional assessment attempts to discover the purposes, goals, or functions of behavior by:

- Clearly describing the challenging behaviors.
- Identifying the events, times, and situations that predict when the challenging behaviors will and will not occur across the range of daily routines.
- Identifying the consequences that maintain the challenging behaviors.
- Developing one or more summary statements or hypotheses that describe specific behaviors, specific types of situations in which they occur, and the reinforcers that maintain the behaviors in that situation.
- Collecting directly observed data that support these summary statements.

[From: **Families and Disabilities Newsletter** *(Winter 1997), Beach Center on Families and Disabilities.]*

Views From the Field

PBS is a relatively new concept. We are only beginning to understand its implications for effecting positive change in children, youth, and adults. Following are perspectives from the field.

Understanding the "Why" of Behaviors in Children from Different Cultures

Cultural sensitivity is critical when working with children—especially when children are from families that have recently immigrated to the U.S. "As a school psychologist, I always consider cultural reasons for the behavior," **Daniel Valdes-Agrait** tells us. "Otherwise, you run the risk of not seeing the true meaning of the behavior, which can lead to misdiagnosis and misguided treatment approaches."

Behaviors can differ from culture to culture. Valdes-Agrait shares the following example. A child of Puerto Rican background was referred for acting out behaviors. The child was described as irritable and said to report having psychotic hallucinations and visions in which he prayed with deceased Indians.

Valdes-Agrait set up an interview with the child and family in their home—"it is very important to visit the home to note any cultural signs." As it turned out, Valdes-Agrait—who has expertise in Puerto Rican folk culture and religious traditions—immediately noticed that a piece of bread had been tacked to the front door and an altar placed in the hallway. He interviewed the child and family, only to confirm what he suspected—the child's mother was involved in what her culture calls entierro—praying to wandering souls to help them rest in peace. "The important thing to remember is that in Puerto Rico, entierro is considered normal and a sign of spirituality," Valdes-Agrait stresses. His intervention? In the absence of other significant symptoms—which must always be considered—Valdes-Agrait recommended accepting the child's report of praying with a dead Indian as real and encourage the mother to select prayer times during normal waking hours.

Belief systems can exist after people have left their home countries. "We must always ask how much the belief system is affecting the child so that we do not impose our own value judgments about the behavior," Valdes-Agrait points out. "It is important to consult with professionals familiar with the culture."

Working with Families

"We have documented proof of the effectiveness of PBS strategies—and what's more, we know that these non-punitive approaches can improve the quality of life for the entire family," **Ursula Markey**, a parent of a child with challenging behaviors asserts. "We must get this information into the hands of families in responsive and respectful ways."

With support from OSEP, Markey is disseminating information about PBS to families in underserved areas. As part of her community-based parent resource center in New Orleans, Markey is providing families with workshops, one-on-one consultations, and trainer of trainers programs on PBS. "The first thing we do is to get families thinking differently about their child and ways that they can impact the child's environment to make a positive difference."

Markey describes the following components of a typical training workshop:

- Families start thinking about behavior as a function of something. Families are encouraged to observe their child to get a sense of the purpose or function of the behavior and to hypothesize about the pay-offs to the child's behaviors.
- Families learn positive strategies, such as redirection, positive reinforcement, how to teach new skills or replacement behaviors, and ways to change the environment.

"An essential part of all workshops is to give families an opportunity to rejoice in their child and share those positive reflections with others," Markey explains. "I know as a parent myself, it can be overwhelming to have a child with challenging behaviors—it's amazing how sharing something positive with others can change one's entire attitude from seeing the child as a burden to a blessing!"

Markey's program, Pyramid Parent Training, is part of the Grassroots Consortium on Disabilities, which represents over 150,000 families from diverse cultures. She edits their magazine, *Tapestry*. (Contact Special Kids, Inc., P.O. Box 266958, Houston, TX 77207.)

For More Information

Check out the National Association of School Psychologists' website for information on topics related to PBS and assessing students from different cultures: **www.naspweb.org/center.html.**

State Perspectives

States are playing an important role in ensuring that practitioners have research-based information on PBS. **Martha Fields**, Executive Director of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, points out that "PBS requires schools to put into place proactive structures that prevent unwanted behaviors and encourage positive ones, while being respectful to children and families."

States face a major staff development challenge in familiarizing all school-based personnel with information about effective approaches. Kentucky and Colorado provide examples of how states are supporting practitioners.

Using Technology to Disseminate Information

"It may seem unusual for a state department of special education to be focused on discipline, but in Kentucky we believe that the stronger educators are in addressing behavior, the better they will be in educating students with challenging behaviors—and when educators feel more competent we see increased opportunities to integrate youngsters with challenging behaviors into more normalized settings," explains **Mike Waford**, behavior consultant in the Division of Exceptional Children's Services, Kentucky Department of Education. "One of our priorities at the state level is to train schools in effective behavioral support strategies and schoolwide discipline approaches." One of the approaches being undertaken is the use of technology to disseminate information.

C. Michael Nelson and **Terry Scott**, faculty at the University of Kentucky, are directing the technology initiative. "The first thing we did was set up a web site where practitioners can get current information, such as resources, ideas, strategies, links to other resources, and discussion groups." The web site, is at **www.state.ky.us/agencies/behave/homepage.html**.

In addition, Nelson, Scott, and their colleagues are developing an interactive CD-ROM on functional behavioral assessment. "The goal is to have a copy of the CD-ROM program in every school district in Kentucky," Nelson tells us. The CD-ROM program, which may also be delivered via the web site, has the following components:

- Overview of the process.
- Functional assessment tutorial.
- Case studies that allow users to practice conducting a functional assessment.

As an added feature, the software collects users' responses so that they can be downloaded and sent to instructors. "This type of professional support can be delivered to practitioners without their having to travel," Nelson points out.

Colorado Continues 1978 Initiative

Twenty years ago, the State Department of Education in Colorado began identifying effective programming components for students with challenging behaviors. According to **Kay Cessna**, "By 1988 we realized that we didn't need new alternative programs or more disciplinary procedures for children with challenging behaviors. Rather, we needed to provide **all** students with strategies for developing positive alternative behaviors and teachers with instructional strategies to support positive behaviors."

The state collaborated with University of Washington researcher, **Richard Neel**, and six school districts to find a solution. The result was a model for providing behavioral instruction. According to Cessna, the model was based on the following assumptions:

- A meaningful behavioral curriculum is determined by the student and discovered by the professional through a functional assessment.
- The focus of instruction is on teaching students **acceptable** ways to reach those outcomes.

As part of the approach, educators look for behavioral intent. Cessna describes a key strategy, "We ask educators, 'what is the student after?' and then follow it with the question, 'if that is true, then how could you teach the child another way to get it?'" According to **Jackie Borock**, Behavior Disorders Consultant, Colorado Department of Education, teachers "like the approach because it has face validity and is easy to implement."

The state has conducted a number of implementation activities, including publication of ***Instructionally Differentiated Programming***. The booklet, which was disseminated to all Colorado school districts, describes the model and strategies. (It is available from the ERIC Reproduction Service, #ED 366 154.)

Teleconference on Positive Behavioral Support

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) is hosting a teleconference series on PBS. For more information, contact NASDSE, 1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 320, Alexandria, VA 22314; 703-519-3800 (voice), 703-519-7008 (TDD).

Contacts

Kay Cessna
Jefferson County Public Schools
P.O. Box 4001
Golden, CO 80401
303-982-6698

Daniel Valdes-Agrait
Northwest Suburban Special Education Organization
1052 Kendall Trail
Addison, IL 60101
630-458-9865

Susan Taylor-Greene
Fern Ridge Middle School
88831 Territorial Rd.
Elmira, OR 97437
541-935-8230

Rob Horner
Center on Positive Behavioral Supports
University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403
541-346-2462
robh@oregon.uoregon.edu

Debra Kamps
University of Kansas
650 Minnesota Avenue
Kansas City, KS 66101
913-321-3143
kamps@kuhub.cc.ukans.edu

Ursula Markey
Pyramid Parent Training Center
3132 Napoleon Ave.
New Orleans, LA 70125
504-899-3938
DMarkey404@aol.com

C. Michael Nelson
University of Kentucky
118 Taylor Building
Lexington, KY 40506
606-257-7925
www.state.ky.us/agencies/behave/homepage.html

Ron Nelson
Arizona State University
Tempe, AZ 85287-2011
602-965-0488
ron.nelson@asu.edu

George Sugai
University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403
541-346-1642
george_sugai@ccmail.uoregon.edu

Ann Turnbull
University of Kansas
3111 Haworth
Lawrence, KS 66045
785-864-7608
ann@dole.lsi.ukans.edu

Mike Waford
Division of Exceptional Children Services
Department of Education
500 Mero St.
Frankfort, KY 40601
502-564-4970

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Research Connections *is a biannual review of research on topics in special education, focusing on research sponsored by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs.*

Kathleen McLane, *Director, ERIC/OSEP Special Project*

Jane Burnette, *Publications Manager, ERIC/OSEP Special Project*

Raymond Orkwis, *Production Coordinator, ERIC/OSEP Special Project*

Developed by Warger, Eavy & Associates for the ERIC/OSEP Special Project. The ERIC/OSEP Special Project is operated by The Council for Exceptional Children through the ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education. **Research Connections** *was prepared with funding from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, under contract no. ED-99-CO-0026. It is in the public domain and may be freely reproduced and disseminated. The opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OSEP or the Department of Education.*

ERIC/OSEP Special Project
The ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education
The Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Dr.
Reston, VA 20191-1589
(703)620-3660 TTY (703)264-9449